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RUEHLA/DTS BARCELONA
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0001
RULXDB/DTS DUSHANBE
RUEHDF/AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF 0001
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y -

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SUBJECT: TURKISH KURDISH SOUTHEAST: ELECORAL ARITHMETIC

REF: ADANA 78

CORRECTED COPY AS FOLLOWS:

Signature Block: GREEN

Subject Line: Turkey's Kurdish Southeast: Electoral Arithmetic

Summary

11. (SBU) The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) released its list of 65 "independent" candidates who will compete for parliament in Turkey's July 22 general election, hoping to elect MPs after 13 years during which no Kurdish nationalists were represented. The DTP-endorsed list includes candidates who were imprisoned for alleged links with the PKK as well as people prominent in NGOs who have not been previously active in the DTP. These candidates are expected to do well in 12 heavily Kurdish provinces in the east and southeast, and could win a total of 30-40 seats in the 550-member parliament. The candidates' platform will include calls for amnesty for PKK fighters, as well as highlighting some issues intended to reach beyond their Kurdish base. Once in parliament, the DTP has signaled that its members will avoid confrontational gestures that led to their eviction in the past. Given the procedural hurdles facing all independent candidates, success by the DTP will require careful vote management. End summary.

Past Performance: Lots of Votes, No Seats

12. (SBU) In the 2002 election, the pro-Kurdish DEHAP (the predecessor of today's DTP) finished in first place in 12 provinces in the east and southeast:

Province	DEHAP vote (2002)	Population (2000 census)	Total Provincial Seats
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Diyarbakir	56 %	1,362,708		10
Van	41%	877,524	7	
Mardin	40 %	705,098	6	
Bitlis	29%	651,169	3	
Agri	35%	470,796	5	
Mus	38%	453,654	4	
Sirnak	46%	353,197	3	
Siirt	32%	263,676	2	
Batman	47%	248,000	4	
Hakkari 45 %		236,581	3	
Igdir	32%	168,634	2	
Tunceli	33%	93,548		2
TOTAL		5,884,585		51

13. (SBU) In this election, the DTP plans to run candidates as independents, i.e. not on any party list. While this is an admission that the party lacks the votes to reach the 10% mark, it is a way to guarantee at least some its members will gain seats. Of the 65 candidates thus far endorsed by the DTP, 30 are running from these 12 provinces and the rest are concentrated in neighboring regions with large Kurdish populations or in cities farther west that have experienced heavy in-migration from the southeast. The final number of DTP-endorsed candidates may change as some candidates may be disqualified from standing and the party could offer its endorsement to other independents.

The Candidates: Lawyers and People Who Need Them

14. (SBU) Most of the DTP's 65 independent candidates are long-time pro-Kurdish activists who have been affiliated with the party and its predecessors. Like the DTP itself, the candidates represent a range of views: for example, both the party's co-leaders Ahmet Turk, who is considered relatively moderate, is running in Mardin and harder-line Aysel Tugluk is one of five candidates in Diyarbakir. The other Diyarbakir candidates include two prominent human rights attorneys, Selahattin Demirtas and Akin Birdal, who are not party officers, but have long been associated with the DTP.

15. (SBU) One "celebrity" candidate is Hakkari's Seferi Yilmaz, the owner of the bookstore in Semdinli township that was bombed in 2005 by two noncommissioned military officers, whose legal case is continuing. His candidacy is sure to galvanize supporters for whom "Semdinli" is shorthand for the Turkish establishment's continued animosity towards the Kurdish cause. Yilmaz himself is no angel, having served 15 years in prison for PKK membership. Three other candidates are in jail for statements made earlier this year during Women's Day and the Nevruz festival.

16. (SBU) In Ankara and Istanbul, the DTP is considering endorsements of candidates whose civic activism has not been previously connected with the DTP, such as Metin Bakkalci, a leader in the Turkish Doctors' Union. One contact noted, however, that while the candidates are more moderate than past DTP slates, connections with the PKK are still a big factor in determining inclusion on the list. This contact also noted that there is a one-dimensional focus on candidates with records of human rights activism to the exclusion of people skilled at dealing with other high-priority issues such as extreme poverty and the effects of massive forced migration in the last 15 years.

17. (SBU) According to the media, the DTP platform includes old standards such as calls for an amnesty for PKK fighters and expanded Kurdish language rights. They are also planning to include advocacy of some non-Kurdish issues such as abolition of compulsory military service and increasing female participation in politics. DTP leaders have also signaled that, if elected, their candidates will avoid provocative gestures, such as speaking in Kurdish in parliament, that sparked controversy (and evictions of MPs) in the 1990s.

Success Depends on Careful Management

¶18. (SBU) The DTP candidates' success will depend in part on the political and security environment in the coming weeks, but also on how well the DTP can manage its votes. For example, in a province such as Diyarbakir, where five independent DTPers are running for the province's ten total seats, the party will need to ask its supporters to spread their votes in a manner that ensures success for as many of its candidates. If the votes are spread too thinly among several candidates, then the party risks having some or all of them coming up short. In Bitlis province, the DTP appears to be playing safe, running a single candidate in a three-seat district, making vote management a relatively straightforward challenge.

¶19. (SBU) The recent constitutional amendment requiring all independent candidates across the country to be listed on the ballots in every province presents further challenges to the DTP. Ballots are expected to be cumbersome with the names of independent candidates difficult to locate, which will likely increase spoiled ballots, particularly by voters in the southeast, where illiteracy is still rife. In Diyarbakir, for instance, DTP's five candidates will be mixed in with at least 34 others.

¶10. (SBU) DTP gains in the southeast will necessarily come at the expense of the AK Party, which currently holds 33 of the 51 seats in the provinces cited in para 2. In Diyarbakir, for example, the AKP bagged 8 of the 10 seats in 2002 while only winning 15% of the vote (because of DEHAP's exclusion from parliament and consequent discounting of DEHAP ballots). If the DTP is able to organize if voters successfully, AKP could lose three or four of those seats. A successful showing by the DTP could halve the number of seats in the area held by the CHP, which has done little to engender support since 2002. While the hard-line nationalist MHP may pass the threshold nationally, it is unlikely to gain a single seat in this region.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The massive escalation of PKK violence in the last month can only amplify the pervasive nervousness within the Turkish political establishment about providing a parliamentary platform for the DTP due to its association with the PKK. As a result, in the weeks remaining before the vote, the GOT may take other actions against the DTP candidates such as arresting some of them or restricting their ability to campaign. Current estimates put the expected number of DTP seats at 20-30 - perhaps not sufficient to meaningfully affect the balance in parliament, but enough to form a parliamentary group and - Kurdish activists hope - enough to advance the currently stagnant debate on the Kurdish issue at the national level.

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